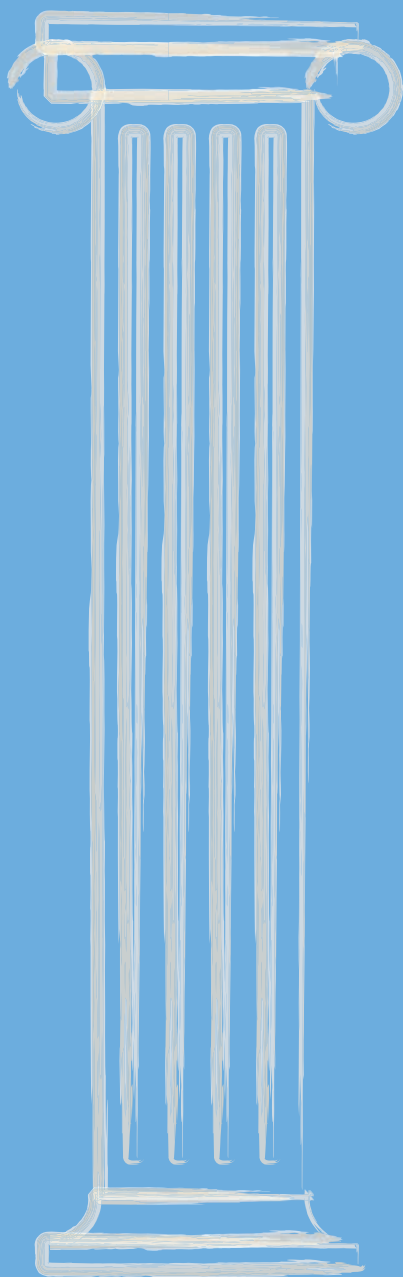




THE FORUM



VIRGINIA'S LABOR MARKET &
OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION
NEWSLETTER



Find the Right College for You!

Yikes! Between all the unsolicited mail you're getting from Nolde U., college fairs, and everyone you know offering their opinions, how do you figure out which school would be best for you? Here are some handy-dandy guidelines to follow to avoid common pitfalls and make the right decision.

Where to go?

You should spend time thinking about the "must-haves" of a college. For some, location is an important factor. For others, size (big or small) definitely matters. Does the school have a strong athletics program? Are students very intellectual? Or are you interested in a school's drama or art department? Different students have different needs and interests. Find out which schools are a potential fit for you.



Virginia Tech - Burruss Hall, Blacksburg, VA

Check that price again

A state school, at first glance, may seem a fraction of the cost of a private college or university. But do students at state schools generally graduate in four years? As a rule, not many do. Check that state school's four-year graduation rate before choosing it over a private school for cost reasons.

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Talk to alumni from your high school

Or contact someone from your high school who's currently attending a particular college or university. Asking just any student at a college their opinion of the school can be helpful, but doesn't offer the same insight as someone who comes from a similar background as you.

Stats worth noting

While rankings can vary widely, and don't necessarily give you relevant information, you should find out a school's freshman year retention rate (it should be 93 percent or better) and the alumni giving rate (which should be around 60 percent). These both reflect how students feel about the school—whether they like it enough to stay, and whether they remember it fondly enough to give money back in the future. If you're applying for financial aid, definitely check the average percentage of demonstrated need met—this number is much more telling than just finding out the dollar amount of the average aid package.

Scoping the digs

Maybe you think you have no time to visit prospective campuses. But then don't come blaming us when you wind up living in a dorm with roaches the size of rats, and rats the size of...well, you get the idea. This is where you will be living for at least four years. Is the food edible? Does the school guarantee housing? How are the dorms? Are the bathrooms clean? If you don't think you'd be able to live there, you probably shouldn't try. This is why campus visits are so important.

While you're there, find out how wired your prospective campus is. This goes beyond the number of computers in the school's computer lab. Is there a T1 connection in all dorm rooms? Is there a computer required for undergrads? (This adds to the price tag too!)

Don't forget to ask an admissions officer, or a knowledgeable guide, about other comparable colleges. You should ask something along the lines of "What other colleges would I be interested in?" It's probably not something to bring up at an admissions interview, but on a standard campus visit, it's a good way to gauge how this college sees itself (or would like to be seen), as well as another way to expand your list of target schools.



University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Websites with links to Universities and Colleges

For Virginia schools:
www.colleges.virginia.cc

For schools listed by state:
www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state

Both of these sites have links to colleges and universities in the United States.



Better Budgeting for College Students

Many college students have little or no experience handling money and find the prospect of sticking to a budget more daunting than a year of calculus because the numbers never pencil out. It's not too late to give your student "the talk" about money.

"Parents don't want to deprive their students, but need to set the stage for open, frank communication about money," says June Walbert, a certified financial planner at USAA Financial Planning Services in San Antonio. "I encourage parents to let kids know that college wasn't so long ago for them, and they understand the challenges." Walbert urges parents to start with the basics when drafting a budget.

Have your student sharpen a pencil and write down the monthly cost of tuition and fees, books, room and board, utilities, food, public transportation, personal car, entertainment and extra-curricular activities. Cut the expenses as fine as possible to give your student an accurate picture of the monthly costs of attending college. For example, transportation might include the car payment, gas, insurance, maintenance and parking. If your student doesn't have a car, include public transportation fares. Personal care could include such things as haircuts, shaving cream, razor blades, toothpaste or makeup. And don't forget clothes. Entertainment includes all of the undergraduate diversions—eating out, movies, sporting events, concerts and music downloads. Extra-curricular activities might include intramural sports, special interest clubs and school-related trips. Don't forget newspapers and magazines.

Next, determine the source of the funds needed to cover monthly expenses. Chart the amount from various sources, such as parents, scholarships, grants, student savings and on-campus work. If you're short each month, ask two basic questions: Where does the needed money come from? And, what spending cuts can be made?

It's a good idea to have your student use a portion of summer earnings for tuition and books. This underscores the cost of a four-year degree and gives the kid a stake

in completing the coursework. If your student works part-time during school, discuss how the money will be split between school expenses and fun.

Think about the type of bank account your student will have at school. Joint accounts are a good way to monitor spending and to make sure bills are paid on time.

Walbert urges parents to think about who will pay the monthly bills. Many students will make mistakes in handling money, but you want the mistakes to be small. If your student has little or no experience handling money, it might be wise for the parents to write the rent and tuition checks. If your student handles money well, it still might be smart

to deposit the tuition and rent money in your student's account a few days before it will be needed.

Credit cards can teach students financial discipline and help build a good credit rating that will become important after graduation, when a car and, later, a house



become important. But play it safe: Put a low limit on the card. Talk to the bank and make sure that the credit limit isn't automatically increased if the bills are paid on time. Be certain your student understands the importance of paying on time to avoid the 20% finance charge. Talk to the bank about boosting the limit each year—perhaps starting at \$500 and increasing to \$1,500 or \$2,000 by senior year. A debit card is a good choice for financially disciplined students. For those who haven't quite made the connection between a purchase and a falling balance, envelopes stuffed with cash and labeled "rent," "books" and "entertainment" are a good way to break down spending. A prepaid spending card is a safe and convenient way to handle money. Parents can track their student's spending and replenish the card online.

It's never too late to discuss financial basics and draft a budget with your student. "A college education is an investment in a kid's future," Walbert says. "Parents have a right to review their investment quarterly or at the end of each semester."

Here are a few key moves to get you and your student started on the road to being fiscally fit:

-- Parents should work with their student to determine how much money will be needed to cover four years of college. The College Board says about \$45,000 is needed at a public university and about \$110,000 for a private institution.

-- If your student is still young, consider long-term plans, such as a 529 College Savings Plan and the Coverdell Educational Savings Account. Look into scholarships, grants and student loans.

-- Teach your student the difference between needs and wants. Your kid needs money for books and lab fees but wants to take a ski trip. Any kid who understands this basic distinction is light years ahead of most students—and many adults.

-- Your homeowner's policy may cover your student's belongings at the dorm. Check to be sure, and plug any gaps as needed. Talk to the campus police about tagging your student's laptop computer—and teach your student the basics about guarding against theft.

-- Some students graduate with crushing debt. Planning can avoid over-reliance on loans, but don't be afraid to

take on some debt. Think of it as an investment in your student's future. The key is getting the right mix of loans, grants, scholarships and cash on the barrelhead from summer jobs.

-- When discussing finances with your student, remember that you're the one with experience and wisdom—share it with your student. Make it clear that your student can always ask questions and mistakes are forgiven, as long as they're honest goofs and not repeated.

Source: Scott Reeves, *Forbes Magazine* (www.Forbes.com)





Teens' Top College Fears and How to Conquer Them

As though you don't have enough to worry about: school, looks, friends, money. Now there's college! Here are some common college worries and some advice on how to deal with them:

I have only have a B average. I'm scared I won't get into a good college.

Fact is, thousands of really good colleges welcome B students. This may be hard to believe, but according to the U.S. Department of Education, "Four of five college seats are non-selective. Any warm body who just *takes* the admission test can get in." Seek out the good professors, get involved in extracurriculars, and develop one-on-one relationships with great professors and students who bring out the best in you—you'll be fine. Really.

I have a C average!

There are good colleges that specialize in C students, and plenty of C students have gone on to achieve great things—David Letterman comes to mind. But, assuming you've been trying reasonably hard at school and still have a 2.5, or lower, GPA in academic subjects, maybe you should consider a path to success other than college. Ever think about an apprenticeship, for example, to become a surveyor or a costume designer? For information on your state's apprenticeships, go to www.nastad.net and click on "links." If the apprenticeship information isn't there, just google *that site* using the term "apprenticeships." How about learning how to run your own business? The U.S. Small Business Administration offers tons of free information and programs. Just go to www.sba.gov.

I'm freaked out about the SAT (or ACT).

Your school grades count much more than the SAT or ACT. Remember that four of five college seats are open to virtually anyone. If, however, your SAT score is less than 900, or ACT is 17 or less, you might want to reconsider your options because fewer than 25% of students with those test scores ever make it to college graduation.

How should you prepare for the SAT or ACT? College Board research indicates that taking a prep course adds only, on average, 25 to 32 points. Retaking it is unlikely to affect which college you end up attending, let alone improve your life. Suggestion—for a few weeks before the test, spend 20 minutes a night with the *Inside the SAT/ACT* CD; and then, unless you totally freak during the test, live with your score.

I can't make myself get started on my college applications.

Are you afraid your application won't be impressive? For 95 percent of colleges, you needn't be a star to get in. Really B- grades, 1000 SAT scores (21 ACT), and, if required, a decent essay will get you into many good colleges, even if you don't have great extracurriculars. Just keep reminding yourself how great it will feel to get your applications done and to get those fat acceptance envelopes. That's not motivating enough? I'm sure that if you ask your parents (and even if you don't), they'll be glad to keep nagging you. Maybe you can even get them to

agree that if you get your applications done by the deadline, they'll get you a car...or something. But why not just sit down and start. Chances are, once you start, you'll keep going. If you get stuck, ask your parent or friend for a little help.



I can't think of a topic for my college essay.

Most essay questions boil down to "How will you contribute more to the campus community than other applicants with similar grades and SAT scores?" You ask, "How can plain ol' me contribute to the campus community?" What's something about *you* that would contribute to the campus community? Many if not most college essay questions will allow you to write about that. Be sure to devote most of your essay to giving examples and anecdotes that prove you have that desirable characteristic. Avoid the Deadly Three Topics. So many students write about these topics that they make many admission officers roll their eyes: 1. How important my parents have been to me. 2. How sports taught me the importance of sportsmanship and leadership. 3. How my trip to another country helped me appreciate diversity.

I worry that my parents can't afford to pay for college.

Don't let the college's sticker price fool you. Most colleges jack up the sticker price so only the rich can afford it, and then offer discounts and low-interest loans to everyone else. Sure, you'll probably have to take out a hefty loan, but nearly all students can

find a good college that—with financial aid—is affordable. Just get your financial aid applications in on time. (Check on each college's website to learn their deadlines.) If, even with financial aid, your family can't afford your first-choice college, try to negotiate with the college. They sometimes "find" extra aid, even for average students. Don't forget about community colleges. Not only are they a bargain, they often have better teachers than at universities because they're hired and promoted mainly on how well they teach, not how much research they crank out.

I worry that college will be too hard.

If a college admits you, it believes that, if you put in the effort, you'll succeed there. Also know that, in some ways, college is easier than high school. For example, if you hate foreign language, in high school, you're stuck. It's required. But at most colleges, you're given enough choice that you can usually avoid a dreaded subject. Plus, if you're falling behind in a course, professors have office hours to help you, and in common killer courses such as calculus, there usually are free or low-cost tutors. The main reason kids fail at college is not that it's too hard. It's that they didn't put in the time. Do that and I'll bet you'll do fine!!

Source: Marty Nemko, www.martynemko.com/articles, Education & Training; "CosmoGirl Guide to College (abridged)."

Education costs money,
but then so does
ignorance.

— Sir Moser Claus

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Please feel free to make copies of this order form.

Financial Assistance...

To find information on financial assistance that may be available to you, please log on to <http://velma.virtuallmi.com/financial/financiallinks.asp?mode=trainfin>.

This site provides information on Sallie Mae college planning, student financial assistance, direct loan-financial aid, paying for school, federal pell grants, scholarships, and other types of aid.

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These products are available at no charge, except where noted.

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_____ **Job Interview Pocket Résumé**—small tri-fold résumé that fits in a wallet or pocket

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United States
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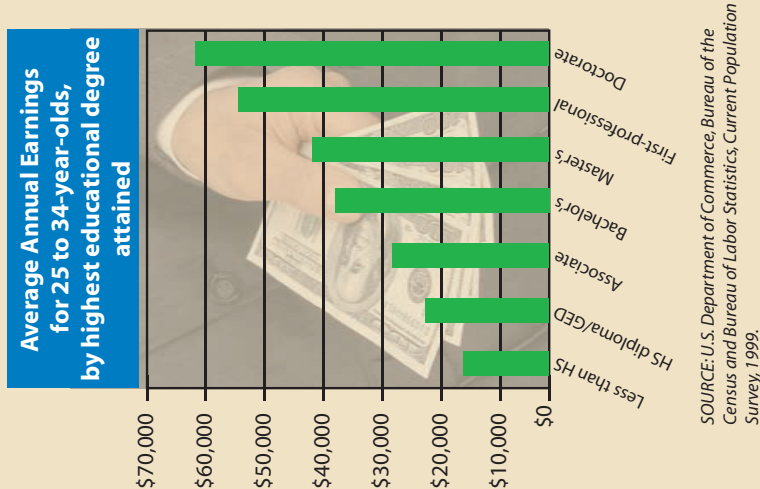


A College Education Can Enhance Earning Potential

Research indicates that higher education can add significantly to the subsequent earnings of some students. Other factors also come in to play, such as family background, natural ability, and the program of study pursued.

By attending college you show that you tend to be more motivated and talented. No doubt you've learned more in high school. These factors coupled with higher education also tend to push up earnings.

Some employers may use college degrees as a criterion to sort out potential employees. They recognize that higher levels of education may indicate higher ability. Accordingly, they look for workers with college degrees and pay them more because of their ability as implied by their higher education. Having a college degree may give you a much-needed edge in today's, and the future's, competitive job market.



For more sources, go to:

http://stats.bls.gov/oes/2002/oes_va.htm

Source: www.explorevirginiacolleges.com

People Are Asking...



What Are Stafford Student Loans?

Looking for a way to pay for your college education? [Stafford Student Loans](#) are the most widely sought after education loans sponsored by the federal government because they're a great, low-cost way for you to obtain the extra aid you need in order to meet college expenses.

About to graduate or already graduated? Then use the free [Student Loan Consolidation](#) service.

Combine all of your loans into one loan with a lower rate of interest so you'll only pay on one loan and you can save hundreds of dollars per month because of the lower interest rate.

For more information on the Stafford Student Loans, go to www.collegerecruiter.com/.

Source: The College Recruiter

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